

Romans 2:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

(For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

Analysis

For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified—οὐ γὰρ οἱ ἀκροαταὶ νόμου δίκαιοι παρὰ θεῷ (ou gar hoi akroatai nomou dikaioi para theō), "not the hearers of law are righteous before God." Ἀκροατής (akroatēs, "hearer") describes one who listens but doesn't obey. Δίκαιος (dikaios, "righteous/just") refers to standing before God's judgment seat. Ποιηταὶ νόμου δικαιοθήσονται (poiētai nomou dikaiōthēsontai, "doers of law will be justified").

This verse seems to contradict 3:20 ("by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified") and 3:28 ("justified by faith without the deeds of the law"). The resolution: Paul here states the standard of judgment (perfect obedience) to show no one meets it (3:10-18), driving all to justification by faith. He's not prescribing how to be justified but exposing the futility of mere Torah knowledge without transformation. James 1:22-25 makes the identical argument against self-deceiving hearers.

The future dikaiōthēsontai ("will be justified") is eschatological—at final judgment, doers are vindicated. But Paul will show this comes only through faith in Christ, who perfectly 'did' the law (Matthew 5:17), imputing His obedience to believers (Romans 5:19, 2 Corinthians 5:21). Perfect law-keeping justifies, but only Christ achieved it; believers receive it as gift.

Historical Context

First-century Judaism emphasized Torah study and synagogue attendance. Many Jews equated hearing scripture read and expounded with righteousness. Jesus condemned this in Matthew 7:21-27 (hearing versus doing) and Matthew 23 (scribes and Pharisees who say but don't do). Paul here echoes Jesus: possession and knowledge of God's word without obedience brings condemnation, not salvation. This would shock hearers who viewed Torah study as inherently meritorious.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. In what areas am I a 'hearer' of God's word—familiar with biblical teaching—but not a 'doer' who obeys it?
2. How does this verse drive me to Christ, recognizing I cannot justify myself by doing the law perfectly?
3. What biblical commands do I mentally assent to without allowing them to transform my behavior?

Interlinear Text

οὐ	γὰρ	οἱ	ἀκροαταὶ	τοῦ	νόμου	δίκαιοι	παρὰ	τῷ
not	(For	G3588	the hearers	G3588	of the law	are just	before	G3588
G3756	G1063		G202		G3551	G1342	G3844	
θεῷ	ἀλλ'	οἱ	ποιηταὶ	τοῦ	νόμου	δικαιωθήσονται		
God	but	G3588	the doers	G3588	of the law	shall be justified		
G2316	G235		G4163		G3551	G1344		

Additional Cross-References

1 John 3:7 (Righteousness): Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

Romans 2:25 (Word): For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.

Luke 8:21 (Word): And he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it.

Galatians 2:16 (Righteousness): Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

1 John 2:29 (Righteousness): If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

Romans 10:5 (Righteousness): For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.

Acts 13:39 (Righteousness): And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Psalms 143:2 (Righteousness): And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.

Romans 3:30 (Righteousness): Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.

Luke 18:14 (Righteousness): I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.